

Misty G. Anderson—Address to the Board of Trustees, Sept. 25, 2018

Thank you for allowing me to address you today. I am Dr. Misty Anderson, I've been a professor of English here at UTK for 22 years, and I am the president of the Faculty Senate. While I cannot speak for all faculty members, my comments today include the hopes and concerns of many colleagues who have been in touch. I thank John Compton, chair, and trustees Donnie Smith, and Amy Miles for reaching out to me and to the Senate. Because the UT FOCUS Act removed the faculty trustee from the Board, that contact is even more important if we are to move UT forward together. We applaud Mr. Compton's call for more transparency, and a look at the UT system's structures in this time of transition. We remain committed to helping this Board right our ship.

The last few years were challenging for UTK Faculty. Most feel thrown under the bus in legislative skirmishes that have more to do with re-election bids than with facts, and from representatives who couldn't even get a second for a resolution to condemn Nazis after we were compelled by law to host them on campus last spring. Try explaining that to your black and Jewish students. Many are demoralized by the treatment of LGBTQ folks on campus; by threats of outsourcing; by new layers of data collection and bureaucracy, and by sweeping policy changes that came down even as we were being cut out of the processes of formal shared governance. So, at the end of last year, we affirmed 3 guiding values going forward as a senate: academic excellence; true civility; and the dignity of work.

Professors are the long-term stewards of this institution; we're here for our students, now and long after they graduate. Here's the rub: we are at an all-time high in terms of research grants secured, student successes like 19 international Fulbright Scholars, and individual programs rising in their fields. Yet we fell in national rankings. How do we explain this? Failures of leadership in times of crisis, which have taken a toll on individuals and on the university. We call on you, with the Interim President, to address them.

We applaud Mr. Boyd for standing against mandatory outsourcing, which most of our campus opposes, along with 70 of our legislators. We also applaud Mr. Boyd's commitment to educational access through TN Promise and Drive to 55 and call on him to realize that commitment by making UT welcoming to all. One of the most devastating numbers of the last month was our #3 ranking on the list of LGBTQ unfriendly schools, topped only by Brigham Young and College of the Ozarks. That number comes from polls of our students, 89% of whom are from in state. These Tennesseans feel betrayed, and they deserve the kinds of services that other SEC schools, and indeed most colleges and universities, offer; an Office of Diversity and Inclusion, a funded Pride center, and the will to stand up to legislative interference. People will go elsewhere if we don't and that leaves our state behind. That's a retention, recruiting, and economic issue as well as a moral issue. Our Alumni give the same message; diversity is important to the survival of their businesses. So until we address this number head on, it will continue to obscure our successes and crush the better angels of our nature. Words AND deeds must show that Vol means ALL, y'all, regardless of race, creed, sex, or sexuality. It is already a national issue: what will you do about it?

Finally, faculty have serious concerns about the attacks on our profession and on the principle of tenure in treacherous political times. Tenure is a guarantee of due process, not a job for life, and

it ensures that in a democracy, those charged as stewards of old knowledge and creators of new knowledge cannot be fired at will. Most faculty members earn roughly what a high-school principal earns. We have all gone through annual review, with post-tenure review in problem cases, for many years. The new, expensive policy adds a labor-intensive layer of reviewing the reviews and making reports on reports, for unclear outcomes, while leaving the university vulnerable to charges that we are weakening tenure, a perception that probably already hurt us in rankings. We need academic leaders who can navigate our flagship forward, with deep knowledge and experience of our American, land grant universities. We therefore ask you to include elected faculty representatives on the search committees for our next permanent System President and campus Chancellor.